

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for presorting a plurality of rules for filtering a packet in network, the method comprising the steps of:
 - (a) selecting a characteristic for sorting the plurality of rules, said characteristic having a plurality of possible values;
 - (b) associating each rule with at least one value for said characteristic;
 - (c) receiving the packet;
 - (d) at least partially analyzing information in the packet to obtain said value for said characteristic;
 - (e) selecting at least one of the plurality of rules according to said value to form at least one selected rule; and
 - (f) applying said selected rule to the packet, such that the packet is permitted to enter the network or alternatively is dropped.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of rules are presorted according each value for said characteristic.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein said characteristic is at least one of a source address of the packet and a destination address of the packet.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein said characteristic is a combination of said source address of the packet and said destination address of the packet.
5. The method of claim 3, wherein a user is associated with each value of said characteristic, such that step (b) further comprises the steps of:
 - (i) assigning at least one privilege to said user; and
 - (ii) determining whether to associate each rule with said value of said characteristic according to said at least one privilege.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein step (i) further comprises the step of determining a user profile of associated rules according to said at least one privilege.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein said user profile is further associated with a group profile, such that a plurality of values for said characteristic is associated with said associated rules of said group profile.